

Wanderers need a Middlesbrough miracle!

FA CUP PREVIEW BY STUART EARP



WYCOMBE Wanderers will take the field at Ninian Park, Cardiff, tomorrow (Saturday), knowing full well that they have only the slimmest chance of repeating last year's F.A. Cup heroics.

Everything points to a Cardiff victory and both the manager, Brian Lee, and his players realise just what they are up against.

Like Peterborough United, who beat Wycombe two years ago, City are a side full of confidence and they are currently unbeaten in their last eight outings. Much of the credit for Cardiff's recent resurgence of form is down to manager Jimmy Andrews.

Andrews took over when Frank O'Farrell left the club last year. Cardiff were relegated and the manager set about the fight ahead and promotion back to Division Two. To achieve that goal, Andrews had to strengthen his squad. He dug deep into the club's reserves to capture Mike England, Doug Livermore and Adrian Alston.

All three players have played major roles in pushing their club into fifth place in Division Three and although promotion is priority, a good cup run would do much to bring back the crowds to Ninian Park and also put money in the kitty.

Looking at this Cardiff side, it is difficult to find any weakness at all. They work as a team but allow individual flair to flourish within it. A good example is Willie Anderson. This former Manchester United and Aston Villa winger is currently enjoying a new lease of life with the Welsh club. It was only a month ago that he handed in a transfer request but since then he has really begun to enjoy his football.

The way he destroyed Millwall last Saturday at the Den was ominous for Wycombe and unless they keep the tightest possible check on this player, he is likely to cause them no end of trouble, not only laying on goals from the flanks but also scoring them as well.

Another player who will be difficult to contain is



The Cardiff squad pictured this season. Back row (from left to right): R. Durham (physio), C. Charles, P. Sayer, R. Morgan, B. Clark, F. Pethard, R. Healey, W. Irwin, D. Showers, K. Pontin, S. Wilson, J. Buchanan, A. Larcom, K. Whitfield (assistant manager). Front row: D. Giles, T. Evans, P. Dwyer, J. Andrews (manager), G. Reece, A. Villars, Battley.

City hot-shots look too powerful

centre forward Tony Green while fellow striker Adrian Alston is big, fast and strong. But it is not only up front that Cardiff impress. With Welsh international Gil Reece in midfield alongside Doug Livermore, they are well balanced while Mike England holds the defence together with all his years of experience.

What chance then, have Wanderers got against that?

Not much according to manager Brian Lee. He feels his side will do well to contain the Welshmen and hopes they will play to their capabilities. But Brian is first to point out that his present team is not as strong as last year, which beat

Bournemouth and held Middlesbrough.

Skipper Keith Mead doesn't think much of Wycombe's chances either. "If Cardiff play at their best, we could be in trouble," said Keith. "But if we raise our game and contain them they might be in for a surprise."

That seems to be Wanderers' best hope. There's not much doubt they will give 100 per cent and more tomorrow and by chasing, harassing and keeping tight, they could just throw Cardiff out of their stride. They did it to Bournemouth, they did it to Middlesbrough at Loakes Park.



There seems little chance of City being overconfident. The manager and his players know all about the Blues and their fame in holding "Boro" last season will probably count against them. No one will take them lightly now. If there is any complacency in the home team, however, Wycombe will be quick to capitalise. Personally, I can't see it happening.

This will be the first time in 37 years that Cardiff have met non-league opposition in the F.A. Cup.

Much could depend on the pattern of the game. If Cardiff break through early on, it could give them the confidence to rattle in several more, for they have the potential to do just that. In

their last Cup tie, for instance, they thrashed Exeter City 6-2 at Ninian Park. But if Wycombe can hold their early attacks, City might become frustrated.

It is as well Wanderers have one of the best non-league defences around. The back four will come under concerted pressure but with the experience of Keith Mead and John Delaney, they are better equipped than most. Anderson's speed will again cause them problems, however.

It looks as though Dave Bullock will be in at full back with Paul Birdseye, as Ray Eaton has yet to regain his fitness after injury. Both full backs know the task facing them tomorrow.

Midfield too will be vitally important. If Wycombe's trio can pressurise their counterparts into mistakes, they will nullify the effect of Cardiff's forwards. Up front, Wanderers will find it difficult to break through, although Mick Holifield might pose problems with his pace.

I expect Wycombe to field the same 12 that beat Bedford in the last round with Dave Alexander as substitute.

I'm afraid the picture looks gloomy for Wanderers but people were saying exactly the same thing this time last year when they met Middlesbrough. The Blues excelled themselves then — can they do it again?